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## POEM OF THE CHASE.

THERE are many poems of great beauty and interest in the Irish language, several of which have become known to the English reader through the medium of a translation. Of those poems there is a particular class known to Irish scholars by the name of the "Fenian Tales"—an appellation which they derive from Finn, or Fionn, the son of Cumhail (the Fingal of Macpherson), and his heroes the FIONNA EIRONN. Fionn, renowned for his martial exploits, flourished about the beginning of the third century, under Cormac,\* of whose forces he was the commander-in-chief. He has been to the Milesian bards what King Arthur was to the Britons, the theme of many a marvellous achievement and poetic fiction. Oisín, his son, was equally celebrated as a warrior and a poet; and of him it might be said, as of Achilles, Æschylus, Alfred, Camoens, Cervantes, and many another, that "one hand the sword and one the harp employed." Numerous poems have been ascribed to him; but there is no proof that he has a legitimate claim to any composition extant. As for the impostures of Macpherson, they have been sufficiently exposed; and no one who has taken pains to investigate the subject, or who has the least knowledge of Irish history, antiquities, or language, will pretend that he is worthy of the slightest credence. The date and origin of the Fenian Tales, from which he drew many of the materials of his centos, are altogether uncertain. It may seem, however, not unreasonable, from slight internal evidence, to conjecture that some of them may have been composed soon after the introduction of Christianity, though they must since have suffered many changes and modifications.† In few countries, if in any, did the Christian religion win its way more easily than in Ireland; and yet it can scarcely be supposed that its triumph became universal without some reluctance on the part of the people, whose habits it condemned, and to whose superstitions it was strenuously opposed. It attempted to produce such a complete revolution in their tastes and occupations, that it would be surprising had not various objections been started to its reception. The quiet and devotion of the monastic life formed a melancholy contrast to the spirit-stirring excitements of the chase, and to those games of strength and skill in which the heroes of the Ossianic age delighted. They who rejoiced in the clash of arms, in the music of hounds and horns, and in the feast and the revel, could have small taste for the chiming of bells in the services of religion, for the singing of psalms, and still less for fasting—

——— the waster gaunt and grim,

That of beauty and strength robs feature and limb.

The bards, it may well be imagined, who were always not only welcome but necessary guests at all the high festivals of the chiefs and princes, would be among the first to lament a change of manners by which their pleasures and honours were abridged or abolished; and to give more effect to their complaint, as well as to conceal its real authors, they put it into the mouth of Oisín, their great master, by poetic licence, though in violation of chronology. They ascribed to him those sentiments which they thought he would have expressed, had he really been the contemporary of Saint Patrick.‡ At the same time it must be admitted, that in the Poem of the Chase at least, such a description of the creative power of the Deity is given by the saint, as is worthy of a Christian missionary,

\* Cormac Ulfada, grandson of "Con of the hundred battles." He reigned forty years, and was honoured as a wise statesman and a philosopher.

† The reader who feels an interest in this subject, and in the Ossianic controversy, is referred to the essays by the Rev. Dr. Drummond and Mr. O'Reilly in the fifteenth volume of the Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy. In the Transactions of the Hiberno-Celtic Society Mr. O'Reilly observes, that "many beautiful poems are extant that bear the name of Oisín, but there are no good reasons to suppose that they are the genuine compositions of that bard. If ever they were composed by Oisín, they have since suffered a wonderful change in their language, and have been interpolated so as to make the poet and St Patrick contemporaries, though the latter did not commence his apostolic labours in Ireland until the middle of the fifth century, when by the course of nature Oisín must have lain in his grave about one hundred and fifty years."

Since this paper was sent to the press, the author has been assured by a most competent Irish scholar that there are manuscript poems attributed to Oisín not less than a thousand years old in the Library of the Dublin University. It is much to be wished, for the honour of ancient Irish literature and for the light which these poems may throw on some dark and disputed topics of Irish history, that they may before long be properly analysed and presented to the public.

‡ Thus Horace exposes the arts of the parasites and fortune-hunters of Rome in a dialogue between Tiresias and Ulysses.

though he is obliged to succumb to the stern indignation of the "Warrior Bard."

Leaving the further consideration of this subject for the present, I proceed to give an analysis of the Poem of the Chase, from which the reader may be enabled in some degree to judge how far Spenser is justifiable in affirming that the poems of the Irish bards "savoured of sweet wit and good invention."

The poem commences by Oisín asking 'St Patrick if he had ever heard the tale of the chase; and on receiving an answer in the negative, accompanied with a request that it may be told truly, he feels indignant at the suspicion that he or any of the Fionna Eironn could ever deviate from the strictest veracity, and retaliates by declaring how much he prized his former friends, whose virtues he records, beyond Patrick and all his psalm-singing fraternity. Patrick, in reply, exhorts him not to indulge a strain of panegyric which borders on blasphemy, and extols the power of that great Being by whom all the Fenian race had been destroyed. The mention of his friends' extinction calls forth a fresh burst of indignation from Oisín, and leads him to compare the pleasures of the days gone by with the melancholy occupations of psalm-singing and fasting. Patrick requests him to cease, and not incur the imputations of comparing Finn with the Creator of the universe. Oisín replies in a style more indignant, and after reciting a number of the glorious exploits of the Fenians, asks by what achievements of Patrick's Deity they can be matched. The saint, justly shocked by such daring, accuses him of frenzy, and tells him that Finn and his host have been doomed to hell-fire by that God whom he blasphemes: but this only provokes Oisín to make a comparison between Finn's generosity and the divine vengeance; and as for himself, it is a sufficient proof of his sanity that he allows Patrick and his friends to wear their heads. Patrick, as if tacitly admitting the validity of his argument, pays him a compliment, and requests him to proceed with the promised tale. Oisín complies, and informs him that while the Fenian heroes were feasting in the tower of Almuin, Finn having withdrawn from the company and spied a young doe, pursued her with his two hounds Sceolan and Bran as far as Slieve Guillin, where she suddenly disappeared. While he and his hounds are left in perplexity, he hears a sound of lamentation, and looking round spies a damsel of surpassing beauty, whom he accosts, and with friendly solicitude asks the cause of her grief. She replies that she had dropped her ring into the adjoining lake, and adjures him as a true knight to dive into the water to find and restore the lost treasure. He complies, and succeeds; and while handing her the ring, is suddenly metamorphosed into a withered old man.

Mean time the absence of their chief begins to create some fears for his safety in the breasts of the Fenians. Caoilte expresses his apprehension that he is irrecoverably lost, when bald Conan, the Thersites of the Fenian poems, rejoicing at the idea, boasts that he will in future be their chief. The Fenians having indulged in a laugh of scorn to hear such arrogance from one they contemned, proceed in quest of Finn, and discover the old man, who whispers in the ear of Caoilte the story of his strange metamorphosis. Conan, on hearing it, waxes valiant, and utters some bitter reproaches against Finn and the Fenians. He is rebuked by Caoilte; but still continuing to vituperate and boast, he is answered at last by the sword of Osgar. The Fenians interfere, and having put an end to the strife, and learned the cause of Finn's misfortune, they search the secret recesses of Slieve Guillin, and at length find the enchantress, who presents a cup to Finn, of which he drinks, and is restored to his former strength and beauty.

Miss Brooke, a lady to whose genius and taste Irish literature is greatly indebted, has given a translation of this poem in her "Reliques of Irish Poetry," published in 1788. Every Irish scholar is bound to speak with respect of her patriotic literary labours, and the present writer would be among the last to pluck a single leaf from the chaplet which adorns her brows—

——— neque ego illi detrahère ausim

Hærentem capiti multa cum laude coronam.—HOR.

Not from her head shall I presume to tear

The sacred wreath she well deserves to wear.—FRANCIS.

To Miss Brooke is due the well-merited praise of having been the first to introduce the English reader to a knowledge of these compositions. But that province of translation into which she led the way is open to all, and no one has a right

to claim it as his exclusive property. Chapman translated Homer: he was followed by Hobbes, Hobbes by Pope, Pope by Cowper, Cowper by Sotheby. Who will be the next competitor in this fair field of fame? How many translators have we of Virgil, of Horace, of Anacreon, and of all the most eminent Greek and Latin poets, each advancing a claim to some kind of superiority over his rivals? Would that we had more such honourable rivalry in translations from the Irish! Miss Brooke has been faithful to the sense of her originals; but it appears to the present writer that she not unfrequently errs by being too diffuse, that several passages are weakened by unnecessary expansion, and that the spirit of the whole can be better preserved in a more varied form of versification than in the monotonous quatrains which she adopted. The prevalent fault of most poetical translations is diffuseness or amplification, by which the thoughts are weakened and their spirit lost. Much allowance, however, must be granted to those who attempt to clothe in English verse such compositions as the Irish Fenian tales; and any one who makes the experiment will feel the difficulty of preserving a just medium between a loose paraphrase and a strict verbal translation. It is almost if not altogether impossible to translate into rhyme without an occasional accessory idea or epithet on the one hand, and the omission of some unimportant adjunct on the other. The great object should be to preserve the spirit of the original—to be “true to the sense, but truer to his fame”—*nec verbum verbo reddere fidus*. Some passages could not be understood, others would not be endured by any reader of taste or refinement if rendered word for word.

In my next communication I shall send you a translation of the first part of the Poem of the Chase—namely, the introductory dialogue between Patrick and Oisín. This shall be followed by the succeeding part of the poem, should you deem such compositions suited to the pages of your “Journal,” which I hope will be eminently useful in promoting both the literary and moral taste of the people of Ireland. D.

## DEAF AND DUMB—A MOUNTAIN SKETCH.

BY MRS S. C. HALL.

It has been a general and certainly a well-founded complaint against Ireland, that the arts, whose influence has extended so much over England and Scotland during the last half century, have made but little progress in “the Emerald Isle.” It “has sent forth painters, but encouraged none.” This I fear is true, though lately I have been delighted to observe some very happy exceptions to the rule.

There are many reasons why art and artists have not flourished in Ireland. The greater number of those who have the means to patronise talent are absentees, spending in foreign lands the produce of the riches bestowed by the Almighty on their own—while the minds of the residents are usually so pre-occupied by religious or political controversies, that they have no time to bestow, or attention to give to anything else. Another reason I would urge, even at the hazard of being charged with national pride, is, the country so overflows with natural beauty, that in the matter of landscape painting the Irish gentry are hard to please. To those who doubt this, I would simply say, come and see; and if any English artist does not discover good cause why they should be fastidious, all I can observe is, that I shall be very much astonished. Even the highways are crowded with antiquarian and picturesque beauty; but road-makers do not seek these so much as convenience; nor are the most-talked-of places those where a “landskipper,” as I heard an artist called in Kerry, will reap the richest harvest.

There are hills and lakes, rivers and glades, of most exquisite beauty, profusely scattered over the country—far away from the highroads, in the fastnesses of the mountains—and even within hearing of the roar of the wild ocean are dells and little valleys, cascades, lawns of greenest hue and softest grass, where Druids’ altars hang upon their mysterious points of rest, and the breeze whispers amid mouldering towers—memorials of the troubled past. Still, eyes accustomed from their opening to really fine scenery are not likely to be satisfied with aught that falls short of perfection; and, as I have said, I find such of my countrymen as really love art very hard to please in landscape, particularly in Irish landscape: they have become familiar with the same scenes from many points of view—the artist can only record one, and it is at least likely that the one he has chosen is not the favourite.

Still, I fear, the chief cause why art has not flourished hitherto, must be attributed to the continued excitement of religion and politics; to judge from collateral evidence, the influence of this excitement is happily on the decrease, for I have seen framed prints in several cottages, and observed in many dwellings, where paintings would be an extravagance, volumes of beautiful engravings displayed as the chief treasures of their country homes.

On our late pilgrimage through the beautiful and romantic “Kingdom of Kerry” we encountered a native artist, who beguiled us of an hour, and interested us deeply. We had lingered long in the beautiful vale of Glengariff, and still longer on the mountain road which commands a view of the magic bay and its golden islands, that seem lifted by earth towards heaven as a peace-offering; and when we passed through the tunnel, which is still regarded by the mountaineers with evident astonishment, the sun was sinking behind the huge range of Kerry mountains, which looked the more bleak when contrasted with the memory of the exceeding fertility of Glengariff. We were then literally *amid* both clouds and mountains, and the only sound that disturbed the awful stillness of the scene was the scream of an eagle, which issued from behind a tower-like assemblage of barren rocks, where most probably the eyrie of the royal bird was placed; the sound added greatly to the effect of the scenery, and we drew up that we might listen to it more attentively; it was several times repeated, and almost at the same instant a fresh breeze dispersed the mists which had in some degree obscured the glory of the departing sun; and the valley beneath the pass became literally illuminated wherever the breaks or fissures in the opposite mountains permitted the brightness of the sun, as it were, to pass through. I had never seen such an effect of light and shade before, for the mountain shadows were heavy as night itself; I feel I cannot describe either the brightness of the one or the intenseness of the other. I am sure the scene could not be painted so as to convey any idea of its reality. Any attempt to depict the extravagance of nature is always deemed unnatural.

We are weak enough to bound the Almighty’s works by what has come within the sphere of our own finite observations. How paltry this must seem to those who dwell amongst the mountains, and read the book of ever varying nature amid the silent places of the earth!

I had been gazing so earnestly upon the scene below and around us, that I had not noted the sudden appearance of a lad upon a bank, a little to the left of the place on which we stood; but my attention was attracted by his claspings his hands together, and laughing, or rather shouting loudly, in evident delight at the scene. There was nothing in his appearance different from that of many young goatherds we had passed, and who hardly raised their heads from the purple heath to gaze at our progress. His sun-burnt limbs were bare below the knee; but his long brown hair had been cared for, and flowed beneath a wide-leafed hat, which was garnished, not untastefully, with a couple of wreaths of spreading fern. His garments were in sufficient disorder to satisfy the most enthusiastic admirer of “the picturesque;” and although we called to him repeatedly, it was not until a sudden diffusion of cloud had interfered between him and the sunset, so as to diminish the light, and of course lessen the effect of the shadows, that he noticed us in the least; indeed, I do not think he would have done so at all, but for the unexpected appearance of another “child of the mist,” in the person of a little tangled-looking, bright-eyed girl—literally one mass of tatters—who sprang to where the boy stood, and seizing his hand, pointed silently to us. He descended immediately, followed by the little girl, and after removing his hat, stood by the side of our carriage, into which he peered with genuine Irish curiosity.

To our question of “Where do you live?” the mountain maid replied, “Neen English,” which experience had previously taught us signified that she did not understand our language. We then addressed ourselves to the boy, when the girl placed her hands on her lips, then to her ears, and finally shook her head. “Deaf and dumb?” I said. Upon which she replied, “Ay, ay, deaf, dumb—deaf, dumb.” The little creature having so said, regarded him with one of those quick looks so eloquent of infant love; and seizing his hand, lifted up her rosy face to be kissed. He patted her head impatiently, but was too occupied examining the contents of our carriage to heed her affectionate request. His eye glanced over our packages without much interest, until they rested upon a